

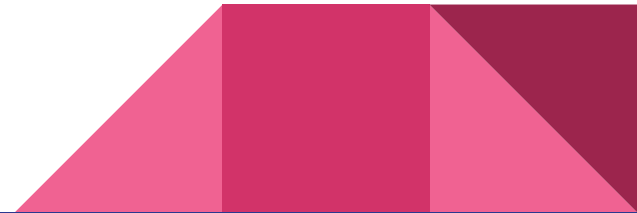
# Cultural Considerations for Academic Writing Pedagogy: Different Routes, Same Destination

8th Teaching and Learning in Higher Education  
25 September 2018

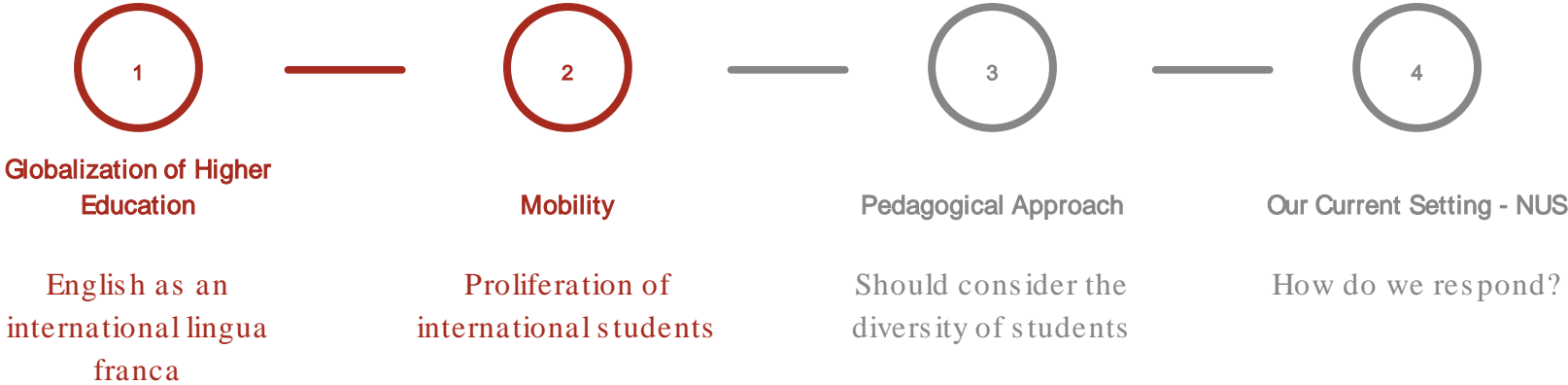
*by*  
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# Overview

1. Premise
2. Case Study
3. Observations
4. Discussions
5. Implications



# Background



**Figure 1.** International Higher Education and its Impact on Teaching

# English for Academic Purpose (EAP)

In higher education, writing is considered a primary tool for assessment (Hyland, 2013)

- Students' final exams; research work
- Teaching staff's research publication

EAP courses - academic writing

Research on academic writing

- academic conventions
  - lexical choice to organization of content



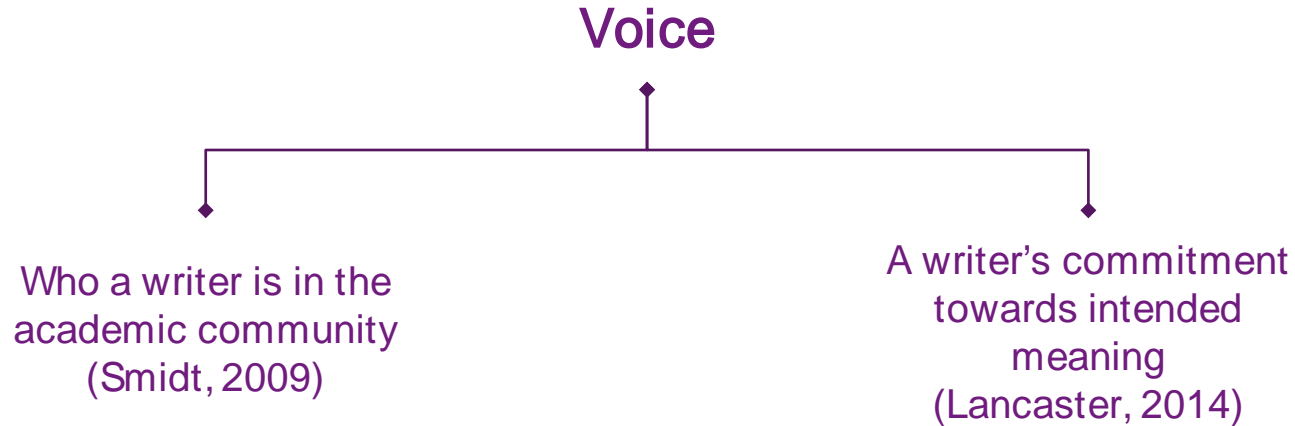
# Voice in EAP

While there may be academic conventions, it is necessary for researchers to develop ‘voice’, also known as stance. Voice can be observed when

“writers express their feelings towards propositions (whether they like them, find them valuable, troubling, and so on) and where they also align themselves with respect to their truthfulness or academic worth” (Liu & McCabe, 2018)



# Voice in EAP



**Figure 2.** Essential Components of Voice

# Issue

International students have some proficiency

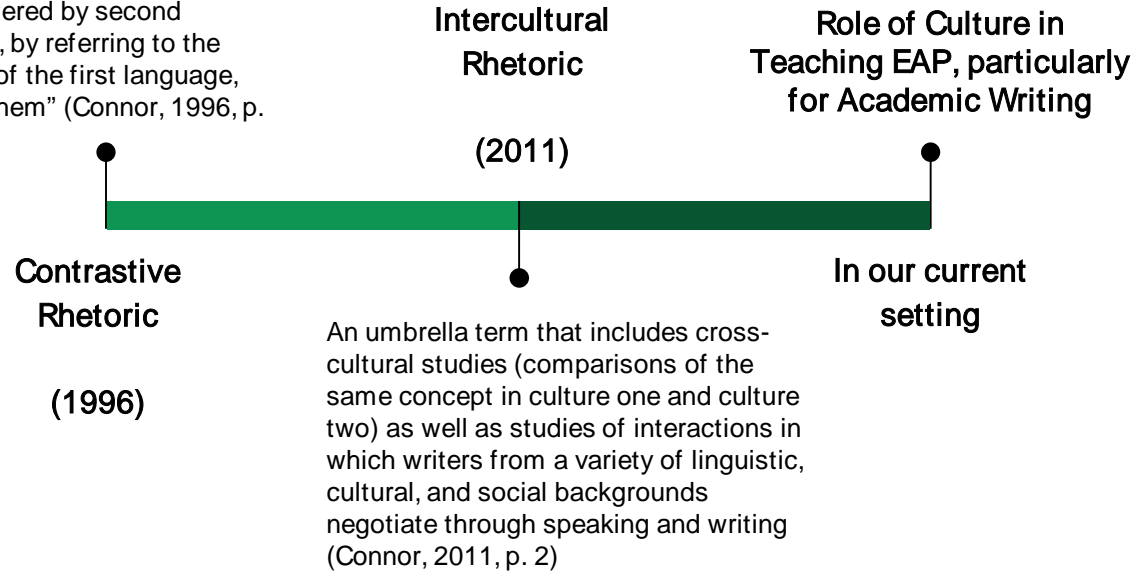
**BUT**

**Culture incompatibility - Students are not necessarily familiar with academic writing conventions (i.e., the concept of voice)**



# Position of Culture in EAP: Development

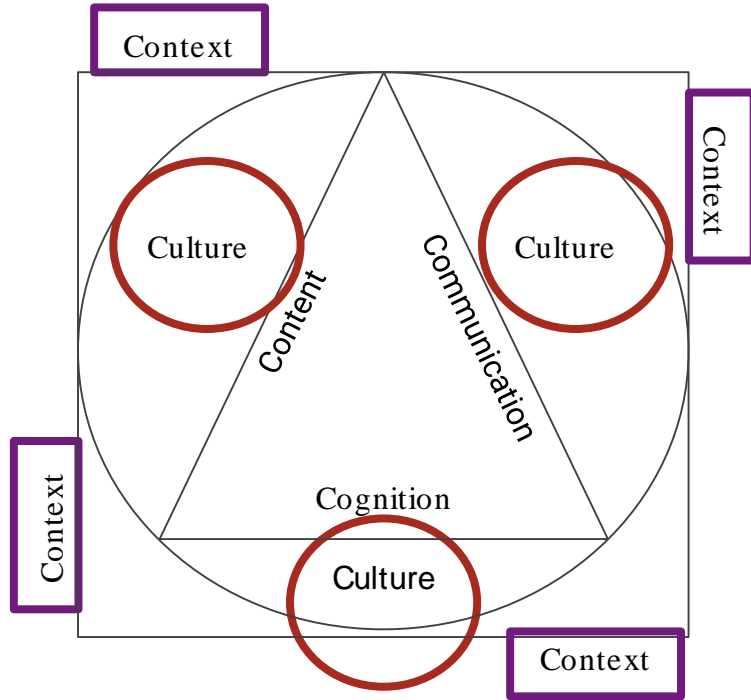
“An area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them” (Connor, 1996, p. 5)



**Figure 3.** Culture in Rhetoric



# Role of Culture in Discipline Studies



**Figure 4.** Content and Language Integrated Learning  
(Coyle, Marsh, & Hood, 2010, p. 41)

# Case Profile

Several postgraduate students from East Asia pursuing their LLM at the NUS Faculty of Law

- Students who did not meet the IELTS/TOEFL scores required and needed language support to cope with LLM course work.



# Case Setting

## Intensive English Course

To equip students with sufficient proficiency to cope with professional coursework by

- Developing clear and effective writing skills, with special attention to grammatical accuracy;
- Sharpening thinking through writing; and,
- Honing critical reading, listening and speaking skills to support effective writing.



# Transition Expected of Students: A Challenge?

General Proficiency

A shift into an English speaking context

Arrival into a new context with proficiency at an international standard (TOEFL or IELTS) but not necessarily meeting the requirements of graduate studies

Academic Proficiency (IEC)

The ability to use academic discourse at the appropriate level (graduate)

Professional Proficiency

The ability to participate with appropriate use of academic discourse (Civil and Common Law)

**Figure 5.** Transition of international graduate students

# Lacking Proficiency or Cultural Mismatch?

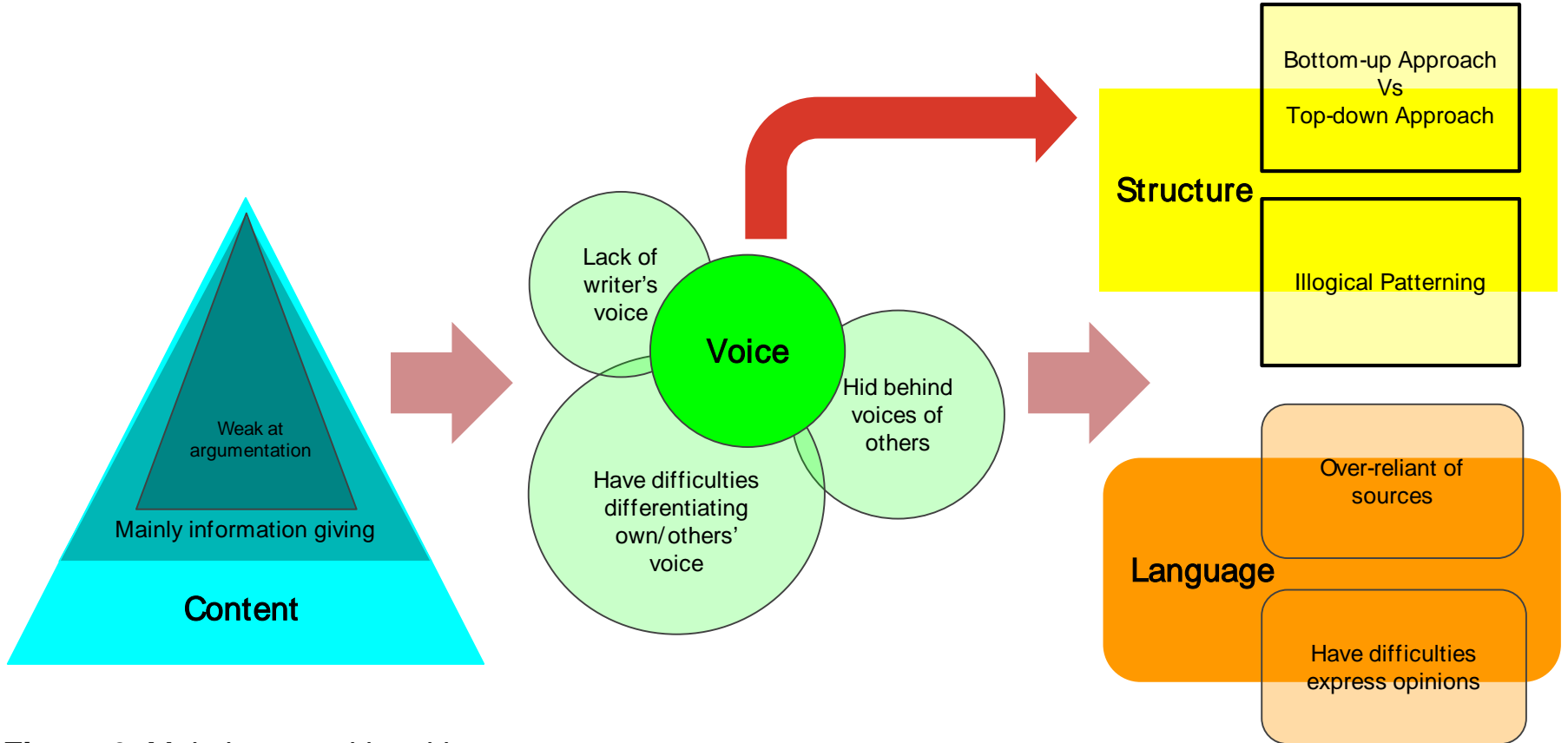
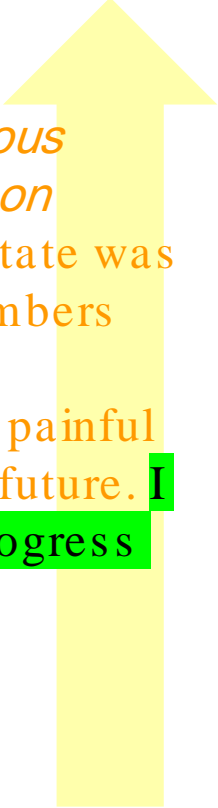


Figure 6. Main issues with writing

# Sample

There is an important report **named** *Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine, Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State* **issued** in August, 2017. Advisory Commission on Rakhine State was **found** in September 2016. It **is a national entity** and the majority of its members are from Myanmar. The report issued by Advisory Commission **posed** **recommendations** which aim to bring about the changes to overcome the painful legacy of the past and construct a dynamic and optimistic Rakhine of the future. **I mentioned this report aims to argue that issuing the report was a great progress for monitor mechanism to solve Rohingya problem.**



# Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy: Rationale

In Chinese culture, Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) found that the purpose of writing is to transmit knowledge, not to create it. Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse (1999) found that students are more likely to adopt a surface approach when teachers focus on transmitting knowledge.

*Need to move beyond the surface approach in our teaching*



# Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy: Rationale

**To help them find a voice, a deeper approach had to be adopted.**

Biggs et al. (2001) describes a deep approach to learning as a student's intention to understand content together with the processes of relating and structuring ideas, looking for underlying principles, weighing relevant evidence, and critically evaluating knowledge.

**These are essential to helping students discover their voice.**





# The Need to Bridge

Considerations

Reconcile cultural differences

Develop communicative  
Competence

Actions

Form an opinion

Frame an opinion

Sustain/defend  
a position

Goal

Writing effectively for their  
modules

# Different (but Complementary) Strategies, Same Destination

## Process Writing (Daron)

Raising linguistic awareness

Using theme based lessons to produce authentic texts for authentic audiences and purposes (See Liu & McCabe, 2018)

## Task based Activities (Sylvia)

Experiential learning

Communicative  
competence  
when expressing  
VOICE

# Process Writing

Examination of writing/rhetorical conventions to:

- Gain an awareness of variations
  - (e.g. compare the presentation of an issue by different authors)
- Expand writing repertoire
  - Recurring words and expressions (reporting verbs; modifiers)
  - Logical connectors (linking words or phrases, pronouns)

See Nordin and Mohammad (2017) for discussion on pedagogy

See Cheng (2008) and Kelly-Laubscher, Muna, van der Merwe (2017) for examples of the examination of texts as a means for learning process writing for graduate students



# Task Based Activities

## Discussions and Debates

Such “genuine, open debate of complex issues” fosters an understanding of the nature and construction of knowledge (Kuhn, 1991)

## Team-based Problem-solving Tasks

Students’ conceptual understanding is shaped and deepened when they work collaboratively and in dialogue with others, both peers and teachers. (Biggs, 1999)

Creating opportunities for learners to listen and evaluate alternative voices in order to discover their own.

Allows learners to situate and and shape their voice by entering into meaningful discourse.

# Results

When asked what features of the course were most useful, the students' responses were

- Reading strategies
  - How to analyze and summarize an article
  - Writing needs to be reader centred
  - **How to organize my ideas for more clarity**
  - **Combine sources and build links to serve my purpose for writing**
  - **Presenting opinion**
  - **Constructing logical arguments**
  - **Arguments and evidence**
  - Critical thinking
  - Presentations that give us opportunities to improve oral English

Many of the students needed guidance in helping them form opinions and construct arguments. **All students agreed that they have learnt useful writing strategies with 67% strongly agreeing.**

# Implication: Role of Language Support

## Misconception

Language support is providing English lessons that teaches grammar and sentence structures

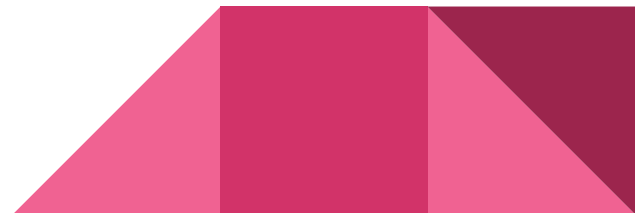
Develops awareness of cultural differences when using language

Facilitates adaptation by creating meaningful learning experiences

Provides rationale to increase motivation for adapting

# Implications

- Need to address cultural diversity not only in EAP but also in discipline specific/professional courses
- Voice is construed differently in different disciplines



# However ...

## Content specialists

- Curriculum crunch
- Language teaching pedagogy and expertise

With international students, the problem is complicated by

- Differing communicative competence arising from varying proficiencies and culture.





# Take-Away

- Learning support is needed to help international students adapt to writing cultures in discipline specific/professional fields.
- Learning support needs to go beyond just linguistic competencies and addresses cultural diversity to help international students adapt.



# Food for Thought

- Is it sufficient to provide support as a bridge? Should support be extended for as long as students need it? (Embedding language support in discipline specific modules)
- What about local students? Is there also cultural diversity that needs to be addressed?



Q & A

Thank you!

[Reference List](#)